



South Peninsula Behavioral Health Services, Inc.

3948 Ben Walters Lane, Homer, Alaska 99603

November 8, 2016

The Honorable Senator Murkowski
709 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Senator Sullivan
702 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Congressman Young
2314 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murkowski, Senator Sullivan, and Congressman Young,

I am writing to ask for your support ensuring Alaskans continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services in rural and Bush communities. The Rural Health Care Universal Service Support budget has remained static for 20 years and must be increased. The current \$400 million budget remains at the initial level set in 1997, despite inflation, advances in technology and increased demand for services. The FCC expects that demand may exceed the cap for the first time in funding year 2016. An equivalent budget today, adjusted for inflation, would be about \$600 million.

Rural Health Care Universal Service Support is essential to enable providers to deliver affordable broadband telehealth services in Alaska's rural and Bush communities. Alaska received more than \$82 million in rural health care support for 2015, a substantial increase from 2014.

If rural Alaskans are to continue to receive the affordable broadband telehealth services they need, the FCC must increase the rural health care budget and index it for inflation, as it recently did with E-rate. The FCC has updated the E-rate budget from \$2.25 billion in 1997 to \$3.94 billion for 2016, and indexed it for inflation, reflecting increases in demand.

Rural health care support enables telehealth services to be provided that dramatically improve access to care, accelerate diagnosis and treatment, avoid unnecessary medivacs, and expand local treatment options.

South Peninsula Behavioral Health Services provides behavioral health services on the lower Kenai Peninsula, which include mental health treatment services, development disability support services, and limited substance abuse treatment. We also provide psychiatric services

including medication management. We use an electronic health record which is internet based, requiring us to have fast and reliable internet service in order to provide accurate and timely client records. We also participate in a couple of intensive therapeutic programs which require transfers of large data files in order for us to comply with the requirements of the programs, which greatly benefits our clients. Our agency often hosts web-based training for our staff as well as the surrounding community, and we depend upon a fast and reliable internet connection to maintain a well trained staff and community. As our electronic health record grows, and as the State Of Alaska requires more real-time data, we will be even more reliant on a reliable connection, and will be requesting higher bandwidth to accommodate our growing needs.

We ask that you urge the FCC to increase the rural health care universal service support budget, index it for inflation, and provide for any unused funds to be carried forward to future funding years. This will ensure Alaska's rural and Bush communities continue to have access to affordable broadband telehealth services, critical for improving access to care.

Thank you for your support.



Carla Meitler
Chief Operating Officer
South Peninsula Behavioral Health Services
Homer AK
907-235-9233

CC:

FCC Secretary and staff